

4 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

seventeenth century, he knew nothing of foreign history, of religion, philosophy, science, or art. His account of debates has been thrown into the shade by[^] Ranke, his account of diplomatic affairs, by Klopp. He is, *I am* persuaded, grossly, basely unfair. Read him therefore to find out how it comes that the most unsympathetic of critics can think him very nearly the greatest of English writers.¹

After this preamble, we will turn to consider the genesis of Macaulay's History, and to trace in his own letters the story of its conception and its production. The best introduction to Macaulay's History is perhaps the review he wrote, in 1835, of Sir James Mackintosh's history of the reign of James II.² There he states clearly and concisely the general views, about the place of the Revolution in English history, which he afterwards set forth in his five volumes. But it does not appear that he had as yet made up his mind to write upon it. The first indication of that resolution appears in a letter written three years later, and the scheme he originally formed was different from that which he finally carried out. The development of the scheme is clearly shown by the extracts from Macaulay's correspondence and diaries which Sir George Trevelyan has printed in his admirable life of his uncle.

It was in July 1838, whilst he was still in India, that Macaulay formed the plan of writing his

History of Eng-
land.

As soon as I return, I shall seriously
commence my
History. The first part, (which, I think, will
take up five
octavo volumes,) will extend from the
Revolution to the
commencement of Sir Robert Walpole's long
administra-
tion ; a period of three or four and thirty
very eventful

¹ Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone (1904), pp. 326,
285.

^a The best edition of Macaulay's Critical and Historical
Essays is that by
Professor F. C. Montague (3 vols.; 1903).